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ABSTRACT

This brief informational flyer presents practical information on the transition from an early intervention program into a preschool program for parents and teachers of young children who are deaf blind. It provides information on: (1) the laws that affect a child with disabilities when he/she turns 3 years of age; (2) the transition process from early intervention to a preschool program; and (3) preparations for agencies and families to assist in building a collaborative transition program. It also delineates steps for a smooth transition, from identifying options available, to selecting a program and sharing information. Sample "best" and "worst" scenarios illustrate the guidelines, and specific responsibilities of the family, the receiving program, and the sending program are charted. A checklist for local agencies coordinating services is also provided as are a few suggestions from parents to other parents. (DB)

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Mississippi Services for Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind

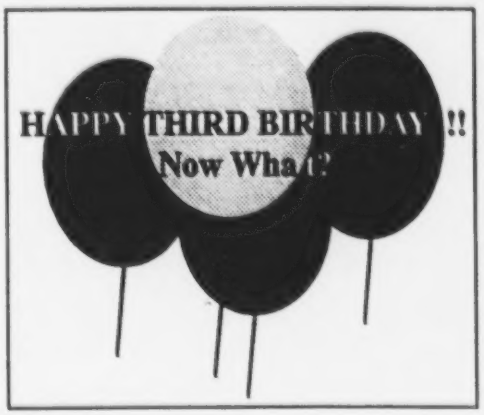
FOCUS FLYER

"Focusing on Quality Services to Infants, Children, and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind"

TOPIC: TRANSITION FROM EARLY INTERVENTION INTO A PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

- Theresa Bennett -

Transition, changing from one program to the next, occurs as children grow older. All children face transition when they reach school age, but for a child with disabilities transition to a center-based preschool program may occur as the child turns three years of age. Parents of children with special needs will be faced with decisions concerning the education and care of their child. Before their child actually attends a new program,



parents must learn about the school system's referral, assessment, IEP, related services, and placement process, as well as become familiar with their legal rights and responsibilities (Hanline & Knowlton, 1988). The transition from home-based to a preschool program can have a positive impact on the families if parents are active participants in coordinating with the agencies involved in the transition process.

This flyer will provide information on:

A. The laws that affect a child with disabilities when they turn three years of age.
B. The transition process from early intervention to a preschool program.
C. Preparations for agencies and families to assist in building a collaborative transition program.

This is the first of many transitions for a child and his/her family. As the child gets older, the transition will include:

Preschool → Kindergarten → Elementary → Junior High → High School → Adult Life/Work

A well planned transition will have a meaningful impact on the child's potential for learning and successful participation in the classroom setting. The teacher's lack of accommodation can create undesirable stress for the child, teacher, and family (Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1988). Communication and coordination are critical components to designing and implementing a collaborative and successful transition.

WHAT DO THE LAWS SAY?

What are the preschool laws according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act? The law amended in 1986 to improve services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities is P.L. 99-457, Part H of IDEA (P.L. 99-142). Children and young adults with disabilities, age six to twenty-two years of age have been assured a free and appropriate public education for nearly twenty years. The amendment addresses the services and service coordination for infants and toddlers. One component of P.L. 99-457 marks transition from early intervention services into a preschool program as a viable component to address.

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Transition requirements included in this law are:

- Written steps are to be outlined in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- Written documentation for a plan is to begin when the child turns two and a half years old.
- A meeting, with the approval of the family, is to be held 90 days prior to the child's third birthday. This meeting to plan the transition should include:

  (1) the family
  (2) the early intervention service coordinator
  (3) related service providers
  (4) the receiving preschool program
  (5) the local education agency

- Written transition goals and objectives must be included on the Individualized Education Plan.

Part B of IDEA mandates the local school district with the responsibility for the provision of special education and related services to children three to twenty-one years of age.

Other laws, which address the transition of infants and toddlers, include the Head Start legislation. Head Start reserves 10% of their enrollment for children three-to-five years who have a disability.

Transition requirements for Head Start include:

- transition planning from the infant and toddler program,
- transition planning from Head Start into a Kindergarten placement,
- transition must be addressed through interagency agreements with the local school district, and
- a transition statement should be included on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

WHY IS TRANSITION PLANNING IMPORTANT?

Changes For The Family

Placement into a preschool/school program is an experience for all families as their children get older. The family's life may possibly be affected by schedule changes, getting up earlier, change in nap schedules, transportation, to staying home when the child is sick. Every child has to make changes when he/she enters a preschool. Planning and preparing for the transition can make changes for the family less stressful.

Changes For The Child

A child with disabilities, who has received services in their own home, will encounter new experiences entering a preschool program. These may include: new faces, different rules, schedule changes, physical environment changes and learning experiences through teacher directed activities as well as peer interaction and communication. The new experiences of preschool can have a significant impact on the child. Therefore, it is important for all persons involved to be aware of these changes. The efficacy of early childhood special education programs depends on this next step (Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1988). If transition planning is coordinated, the child will have a better chance of receiving appropriate services.

Changes For Some Programs

The outcome of the transition allows the early intervention program (or sending program) and preschool (receiving program) to make any adaptations or adjustments before the child begins preschool. Through communication with the family and the sending program, the receiving program may recognize particular needs for the child. There may be a need to: (a) order adaptive equipment, (b) physically rearrange the classroom to accommodate a wheelchair, or (c) possibly revise the transportation route.

The sending program may need to assess their (a) level of participation, (b) roles and responsibilities, and (c) efforts in collaboration and communication with the receiving program to insure that a collaborative model is being developed.

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STEPS FOR A SMOOTH TRANSITION

A. Identifying Options Available

B. Selecting A Program

C. Sharing Information

A. Identifying Options Available

Different programs will be available depending upon where a child lives. Each program has their own regulations regarding who can attend the program.

It is important to begin identifying options for preschool placement six months before the child's third birthday. The service coordinator or early interventionist should help the family locate preschool placement options in the family's area. Many districts are coordinating services with other preschool providers in their community. Options may include:

1. Day Care Centers (church, public, or private). Cost may be fixed or income dependent
2. Head Start Programs (income dependent)
3. Non-Profit Organizations (ARC, United Cerebral Palsy, or United Way Programs)
4. Other local governmental agencies (local Mental Health or Health and Human Services Regional Centers)

What information would be beneficial to a parent when selecting a program? Your service coordinator or early interventionist should provide you with a list of local preschool programs. Also, look through your telephone book. Contact the disabilities coordinator in Head Start Programs, church and private preschool programs, the local school district, day cares and other services that may be available to you and your child.

Asking questions is the best way to find out information. Day care and education centers provide services for children and their families, so consider no question trivial or overbearing. Some possible questions to ask each program may include:

- ✓ How many children are attending the preschool program?
- ✓ Are all the children in the preschool children with special needs?
- ✓ How many adults are in each room?
- ✓ Is there a transition plan for preschoolers entering the program from other programs?
- ✓ Will transportation be provided?
- ✓ Will related services, such as physical therapy be provided?
- ✓ Is visitation to the preschool program welcomed?
- ✓ Are there any other programs that may be appropriate for the child?

B. Selecting A Program

Once preschool options have been identified, visits to the various schools should be made. Families should visit as many programs as possible before a decision is made. If the family feels one option may be an appropriate placement for their child, they may ask the preschool personnel when would be an appropriate time for a meeting to discuss possible placement.

Children with disabilites experience language and communication growth through interaction with children who are verbal and active. A preschool classroom involving children with various disabilities as well as children who are not disabled allows interaction with age appropriate peers. When making a selection, keep in mind some of the following:

- ✓ If the classroom includes only children with disabilities, are they spending any time of the day with peers who are not disabled?
- ✓ Do the children in the classroom participate in school activities?
- ✓ Are related services provided by the receiving preschool?

- ✓ If related services are provided at the preschool, are they incorporated within the daily activities of the classroom rather than the student being "pulled out" of the classroom in order to receive therapy?
- ✓ Is learning active or passive?
- ✓ Are the goals and objectives written on the IEP functional outcomes that will increase the student's level of communication, social skills and independence?
- ✓ Are teachers in the integrated classroom willing to devote time and effort to assure an inclusive, functional, environment for all of the students?
- ✓ Is the physical structure of the classroom inviting and accommodating?
- ✓ Are children in the classroom taught how to communicate with a child who may be non-verbal?
- ✓ Are training sessions provided for the staff on topics such as: learning environments, adapting materials and activities, child observation and assessment, writing functional goals and objectives, forms of communication, and active teaching?

C. Sharing Information

Once a preschool has been identified for an appropriate placement, then what? The service provider, family or early interventionist should coordinate a meeting. Communication, cooperation, and coordination are the key ingredients to make certain that all persons are involved and prepared for transition. Who should attend this meeting?

(1) family, child
(2) service coordinator
(3) interventionist (sending program)
(4) new program staff
(5) speech pathologist
(6) occupational/physical therapist
(7) case manager
(8) other advocates requested by the family

A date and time that is convenient for as many participants as possible should be set. If certain persons can not attend, it is important to get as much information from that person before the meeting and share the information with the other participants. Information that should be shared at the meeting will include:

- Personal data (birth certificate, medical records, vaccinations, Medicaid number -if applicable-, etc.)
- Child history (information briefly telling the child's story of events, accomplishments, surgeries or hospital stays, etc.)
- Medical information (medications or special diets)
- Intervention documentation (documented notes of intervention services outlining goals and objectives, therapy sessions, etc.)
- Special equipment (description of and care of special equipment such as glasses, hearing aids, corner chair, special eating utensils, communication systems, etc.)
- Names and telephone numbers of any related services that are already in place.

HOW CAN WE PLAN A SMOOTH TRANSITION?

It takes planning and organizing to successfully and smoothly complete a job. If a shopping list of items is made before going to the store, you are less likely to forget needed items. Think about the specific needs of the child and find ways to help the receiving program meet those needs. Look over the following Best Scenario and Worst Scenario and see what a difference planning can make.

The difference between a well-planned transition and a transition that is unorganized

Best Scenario	Worst Scenario
The teacher has physically arranged the classroom to accommodate Joey's wheelchair.	Joey cannot move from center to center without moving tables and chairs.
The teacher is familiar with Shante's hearing aids and explains to the class how they work.	The teacher is not aware that Shante wears hearing aids, she is put in time-out for not listening.
The teacher and students use gestures and signs to communicate with Brandon.	No one in the class understands what Brandon is signing.

Best Scenario	Worst Scenario
The teacher lets Casey sit further away from the tape player since Casey doesn't like loud music.	Casey sits close to the tape player and begins to bang his head on the floor when the music begins.
The teacher places Katy's mat and materials on the lower shelf so Katy can reach them independently.	The teacher must hand Katy items she needs.

Appropriate planning and the teacher's readiness to accommodate the child within the classroom will:

- increase the child's ability to participate actively from day one,
- lower the teachers anxiety level for accommodating a child with disabilities, and
- reassure the family that everyone is prepared for the preschool placement.

Transition, whenever and wherever it occurs, requires strategies and procedures to insure smooth adjustment from one environment to another (Rule, Fiechtl, & Innocenti, 1990). The following chart is a guideline for the family and the agencies to recognize efforts needed for a smooth transition.

Family	Receiving Program	Sending Program
Locate preschool options for your child.	Provide opportunities for family to visit.	Locate preschool options for the child.
Ask the preschool any questions you have about their program.	Listen to the family's concerns for their child attending school for the first time.	Provide the receiving program with all necessary information.
Prepare all medical records and other information needed by the receiving school.	Ensure that the family understands placement procedures for the school.	Set up visits to potential sites.
Set up/attend a transition meeting.	Discuss and gather information from sending program.	Set up/attend transition meeting.
Tell them any pieces of information about your child that you feel would be helpful to them. Example: "When Shondra throws her spoon, I always make her help me pick it up."	Give family list of specific needs (birth certificate, materials for the class, etc.).	Ensure that all necessary persons are invited to the meeting.
Bring all materials requested by the receiving program (mat, toothbrush)	Set up/attend transition meeting.	Assist receiving program to make necessary adaptions to accommodate the child.
Decide with the receiving program how communication will be made throughout the year (dairy, notes, weekly calls).	Decide with the family how communication will be made (daily notes, phone, etc.).	Offer to assist during the first days of preschool.

Remember, transition is a crucial time for families who are placing their preschooler with disabilities into a program. It is important for programs to coordinate with each other so the family and their child will have a positive experience.

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HOW CAN LOCAL AGENCIES COORDINATE SERVICES FOR A SMOOTH TRANSITION?

Local school districts, Head Start Programs, day cares, private facilities and other preschool options should review their present level of coordination. A checklist is provided so that an agreement for transition can be developed and implemented.

- ✔ Are children being referred to the local school district before they turn three years old?
- ✔ Is referral information being sent to the local school district in a timely manner?
- ✔ Is there a planned transition meeting before the first day of school?
- ✔ Is there a sharing of training events for the staff members from different agencies?
- ✔ Does the sending program participate in the assessment of the child when determining eligibility for the receiving program?
- ✔ Is there a written procedure for transition into a preschool program?
- ✔ Will the local education agency provide therapy for children placed at another program (such as Head Start or private schools)?
- ✔ Is there any exchange for use of equipment to accommodate the needs of the child? (i.e. The public school providing Head Start with a corner chair to allow the child, who may not be able to sit independently on the floor, to participate in group activities).
- ✔ Does the receiving program provide an orientation for the family in conjunction with the sending program?

When asked about their child's placement on the first day of school, some parent responses included:

"I knew she was in good hands."
"They would take the best care of James while he was there."
"The teacher would listen to the suggestions I made."

The greatest hesitation in placing my child in school was:

"Wanting to be with her all the time."
"Having the teachers understand my child's problem."

Some suggestions offered to parents from other parents concerning transition and the placement into a preschool program:

"Talk to the teachers and the principals before entering school. Make sure that they understand what you expect from the school for your child. Visit the school before your child starts. Sit in on the teacher's class to understand the way the teacher deals with problems that arise."

Mary Parks - Wesson, MS

Dustin is now four years old and attends Crystal Springs Elementary School.

"Check all of your options, choices, groups, schools and programs. Meet the teachers, principal, and special education coordinators. Pick the program that is best for your child. Be patient and it will work out."

Debbie McCray - Tylertown, MS

James is now four years-old and attends North Pike Elementary School.

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